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North Bay, ON

LAND CLAIM

## Algonquins propose 46-lot subdivision

By MARIA CALABRESE, North Bay Nugget Tuesday, June 25, 2013 1:02:18 EDT PM



A private consultant on behalf of the Algonquins of Ontario unveiled an early concept drawing of a 46-lot subdivision proposed for parts of Mattawa River Provincial Park as part of a land claim, including these lots nearest the Mattawa River. This development stage would be almost 20 years away.

**NORTH BAY -** A consultant with the Algonquins of Ontario unveiled an early concept drawing of a proposed 46-lot subdivision in Mattawa River Provincial Park that would be part of the most complex land claim currently being negotiated in Ontario.

The lots would be located on 468 acres of land between McPherson Drive and Johnson Road, and the development would involve relocating sections of a popular hiking trail.

Development represents 2.6% of the total area of the park, and more than half of the park will remain open space. Opponents of the proposed subdivision say it's the area that is used the most by the public and is home to environmentally sensitive wetlands.

The Algonquins are planning an open house Aug. 7 to answer questions about the proposed subdivision.

About 30 people, including provincial and federal negotiators, attended a meeting Monday evening at the Holiday Inn Express to discuss the development plan which is part of the Algonquin land claim involving the transfer of 117,500 acres of Crown land along the Mattawa and Ottawa river watersheds.

The Mattawa River Provincial Park subdivision would be built in five phases, including a dozen lots along the Mattawa River that would require part of the hiking trail to be relocated within existing wooded areas along road allowances, said Jim Hunton, a land selection planner hired by the Algonquins.

The Algonquins propose to enhance the public trail, and they support reasonable upgrades that might be suggested by the Trout Lake Conservation Association and the Municipality of East Ferris, Hunton said.

The meeting heard the Algonquins also want to enhance water quality and fishing in Trout Lake.

The North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority Watershed Advisory Committee meets annually, and the meeting heard its lakeshore capacity modelling must be updated to know how many lots could be sustained on the lake.

The Mattawa River Provincial Park subdivision proposal has already been altered based on public input to preserve a turtle pond, heron colony, lake access points and park space.

The trails have not yet been surveyed and may not be accurate on the subdivision drawing. The drawing could be further altered based on the results of studies that might require new development to be set back 300 metres from the river.

“We’re not the bad guys. We’re going to work with as many people as we can,” Mattawa/North Bay Algonquin First Nation Chief Cliff Bastien told the meeting.

Antoine First Nation Chief Davie Joannis was unable to attend due to a family commitment.

Members of the public voiced concerns about wetlands that would be filled in to build the subdivision, loss of recreational use of the park and road congestion on McPherson Drive, although the consultant said East Ferris has asked the Algonquins to conduct a traffic study.

The Algonquins were urged to reconsider this land in favour of other parcels that may have less value, and Bastien said that would also be taken into consideration.

The Algonquins want open areas and green spaces with a view of the Mattawa River, Pan Lake and Long Lake. They plan to accommodate public parking to access the water and trails, and negotiate with Nipissing, Dokis and other First Nations with overlapping land claims.

This section of the Mattawa River at Trout Lake has historical significance to any aboriginal group living in the area at the time, with evidence of habitation and ochre mining, said Sydne Taggart, land negotiator for the province.

She said it's unlikely this land claim could be settled without transferring some land on the Mattawa and Ottawa rivers.

“The rivers are too important,” she said.

The latest in a string of meetings Tuesday continued discussions about the future of Camp Island. It's an option for the island to remain part of the Mattawa River Provincial Park or to be transferred to the Algonquins.

The Algonquins say they don't intend to develop the island and instead want to preserve its archaeological remains.

Taggart said islands have spiritual significance for the aboriginal view of world creation, and they would have been occupied in summer for harvests and ceremonies marking marriages, births and deaths long before European contact.

She said more research is needed to document that history.

There's an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 Algonquins in the claim territory. The meeting heard most provincial Crown land has been picked over, and this parcel in the park could support quality housing.

The consultant acknowledged it won't be the easiest land to develop because the lots are filled with rock, and the Algonquins would have to decide if the plan is cost effective when they take into account drainage and the cost of removing that rock to make way for septic systems.

After the treaty is finalized, all lands will be transferred to the Algonquin Nation Trust, and development would be subject to a land management plan that follows the rules of a municipality.

Ontario has not negotiated this type of full treaty since 1923, although it has dealt with adhesions to existing treaties.

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#### **LAND CLAIM PROCESS:**

Negotiations are currently in the preliminary draft agreement in principle stage. Some changes are made at this stage of the process based on public input.

Negotiating parties will have to agree to these changes before a draft agreement in principle is presented to the Algonquins of Ontario for a vote. That vote is expected to take place before the end of the year.

The draft agreement in principle is still not legally binding if the Algonquins vote to accept it. It will take another five years of further negotiations with the 31 municipalities affected by the land claim, and more public consultations during a declaration order process by the Algonquins that could exempt projects from being subject to an environmental assessment.

The Algonquins will vote on a final agreement. If it's accepted, it could take another couple of years for the province followed by the federal government to decide whether to adopt and endorse a legally enforceable treaty so land transfers can begin. That process of transferring land could take another 10 years before development is able to start.